Lesson XIV (1978-1979)

THE RENAISSANCE #1--THE RENAISSANCE POPES (Con.)

Prayer
Scripture: 2 Peter 3:1-14
Hymn: 278 "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted"

Pope Pius II (1458-1464) was the most worthy of the Renaissance popes. After Pius the popes were even less of religious leaders and more and more Renaissance princes--patrons of art and literature, builders of Rome, men who felt the full pulse of the Renaissance and who plunged the church fully into the game of Italian politics.

PAUL II (1464-1471)

Paul II had little enthusiasm for the new learning but was dedicated to building up papal power. In this he continued the policies of Nicholas V and Pius II.

Paul II was the son of a sister of Pope Eugene IV, born in Venice in 1418 and named Pietro Barbo. He was preparing to sail to the East on a business venture when news came of his uncle's elevation to the papacy. He turned from worldly gain to the church, advancing rapidly with the uncle's favor. He was appointed archdeacon of Bologna, then bishop of Cervia, bishop of Vicenza, papal proctor and cardinal. When elected pope he wanted to take the name of Formosus or Mark, but was advised to take the name of Paul II. The conclave required him to carry on a crusade, to hold a general council within three years, not to let the number of the cardinals exceed twenty-four and no cardinal was to be under thirty and no more than one of the pope's relatives could be made a cardinal. Paul quickly ignored the solemn agreement on the grounds that the pope receives plenary authority directly from God. He held that a conclave could not dictate to the supreme pontiff. He required the cardinals to sign documents while he concealed the contents by holding his hand over them. He called no crusade and held no council. He appointed three nephews to be cardinals. By decree he limited expenditures for clothes, banquets, entertainments, weddings, funerals and dowries.

He showed favor to Flavio Biondo and a few other scholars but clashed with the Roman Academy. He distrusted the rhetoric of the humanists and condemned the study of the classics. Platina denounced him as an enemy and despiser of learning. As an economy measure he the College of Abbreviators, papal scribes who prepared briefs of papal bulls and the more solemn public documents. Pius II had limited their number to seventy. The dismissed scribes besieged the Vatican for twenty nights before he would give them a hearing. Platina, their spokesman, threatened to appeal to a general council. Paul II replied that he would make whatever changes in papal practice that he chose, recinding or ratifying the acts of his predecessors as he pleased. Platina was thrown into prison and kept for four months of winter without fire and in chains. He was freed and then imprisoned again and the whole Academy was accused of cultivating Greek thought and spreading pagan propaganda. Pomponius Laeto, the leader of the Academy who was well known for exploring old Roman ruins, reading the classics and criticizing the clergy, was imprisoned. Vienius, the pope's vice-chancellor, supervised the torture of several members of the Academy who were accused of conspiracy (1468). Paul II suspended the Academy.
The pope made himself inaccessible and was slow in attending
to papal business. He held audiences at night, sometimes making his
legates wait as late as 3 A.M. for a hearing. He slept during the
day. His critics accused him of staying awake all night looking at
and counting his collection of jewels. He was an ardent collector
of precious stones, coins, vases and curios.

Paul loved sensual pleasures and public amusements. His enemies
charged him with filling his house with concubines. He loved carnivals.
He often watched the crowds from St. Mark's. He dressed in elaborate
robes and painted his face. He added pagan elements to the carnivals-
figures of Bacchus and his fauns and Diana and her nymphs. There were
races of young men, old men, Jews, horses, donkeys and buffaloes. He
gave feasts in the square and threw handfuls of coins to the people.

Paul deposed Podiebrad, leader of the Utraquists of Bohemia, who
had offered to dispossess the Turks on condition that he be recognized
as Byzantine emperor, and gave his throne to Matthias of Hungary.

When Frederick III visited Rome in 1468, Paul gave him the bread
but kept the wine for himself, although on such occasions it was
customary to give a ruler both elements. The emperor was seated on
a level with the pope's feet and required to hold the pope's stirrup.
Two German printers, without the pope's support, set up the
first printing press in Rome.

The pope died after eating two large melons.

Sixtus IV (1471-1484)

Pope Sixtus IV was born in 1414 to an obscure fisherman living
near Savona. He was named Francesco Rovere at birth. He became
a Franciscan friar which enabled him to take a doctor's degree in
theology at Padua. He taught in Bologna, Pavia, Siena, Florence and
Perugia. Paul II made him a cardinal. He was also general of the
order of the Franciscans. There were rumors that a nephew, Peter
Riario, conducted an active campaign for his election to the papacy
and made substantial promises for votes. Sixtus was fifty-six when
chosen.

Political ambition took complete control of the papacy with
Sixtus. He was the first of the popes to assume openly the manner
and methods of secular Italian princes. He was unwilling to rely on
the respect for the papacy generally held by the people. He plunged
into Italian politics and used force to protect and extend the
temporal possessions of the church. He made himself absolute prince
within the borders of the States of the Church. He sought to bolster
his position by nepotism. He filled the highest offices of state
and church with nephews. His relatives became the leading figures
in Rome and in wealth and power rivalled the old Roman families.
Sixtus put sixteen nephews and grandnephews into important places.
Five nephews and one grandnephew were made cardinals; later two
more relatives were added to the cardinalate. Peter Riario was
made a cardinal at twenty-five; Julian della Rovere at 20—both
were Franciscan monks. The grandnephew Raphael Samsone was made
a cardinal at seventeen. Two nephews were made prefects of "rome;
one of them, Lomando, was married to the illegitimate daughter of
Ferrante, king of Naples. Benefice after benefice was heaped on
these relatives. Julian was made archbishop of Avignon, of Bologna,
bishop of Lausanne, Constance, Viviers, Ostia and Valleti, and was
made head of several abbeys (later he would become Pope Julius II).
Riario, who was reputed to be the pope's own illegitimate son, was
made bishop of Spoleto, Seville and Valencia, Patriarch of Constantinople,
and received other rich benefices. He rode around with a retinue of one hundred horsemen. His expenditures were lavish and his palace royal. He did not conceal his mistresses who dressed elegantly—one was noted for her slippers embroidered with pearls.

Sixtus announced a grand crusade against the Turks. The cardinals were sent to the courts of Europe to arouse the princes—Bessarion to France, Marco Barbo to Germany, and Borgia to Spain. They were able to arouse very little enthusiasm. Sixtus sold some of Paul II's jewels to finance the crusade. In 1472 a papal fleet of 16 galleys set sail under the pope's banners with Cardinal Caraffa in command. It was joined at Rhodes by 30 ships from Naples and 36 from Venice. They brought back 25 Turkish prisoners and 12 camels.

One of the most splendid occasions of Sixtus' reign was the visit of Leonora, daughter of Ferrante of Naples, to Rome in 1473. There was a magnificent display of hospitality directed by Riario. Two cardinals escorted her to St. Peter's to hear the pope say mass. At noon Florentine players put on the miracle play of Susanna and the Elders. The next evening a lavish banquet was given—it lasted three hours—three bellows coliced and freshened the air. The historian Ineffusura complained about the squandering of the treasures of the church.

When Peter Riario died of his own excesses at the age of 28, his brother Jerome became the favorite. Sixtus put all the papal possessions at his disposal in 1476. The pope purchased Imola for him and married him to the illegitimate daughter of the duke of Milan, Catherine Sforza. Florence resented the purchase of Imola. The Medici had established a banking business in Rome and had become the papal bankers. Sixtus changed his patronage to a rival banking firm, the Pazzi. He further affronted the Medici when Philip de' Medici, archbishop of Pisa, died, by appointing Salviati to take his place, in spite of the protest of the Medici. Julian de' Medici was denied a cardinalship. A cold-blooded plot was made against Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Julian. Jerome was the leader and his chief agent was Montesecco. The pope and the Pazzi were in on the plot. On April 26, 1478 bloody sacrilege took place. In the Cathedral of Florence, while the host was being elevated papal mercenaries plunged a dagger into Julian de' Medici. Lorenzo was wounded but escaped. At the last moment Montesecco had lost his nerve and refused to commit sacrilege but two priests took his place—one had been papal secretary.

Florence took quick revenge. Archbishop Salviati, his brother, Francesco de' Pazzi, and others were hung from windows. The two priests who had acted for Montesecco had their ears and noses cut off. Montesecco was beheaded. A cardinal, Raphael, was imprisoned as an accomplice.

Sixtus put Florence under interdict and branded Lorenzo a son of iniquity. Sixtus formed an alliance with Naples. Florence secured an alliance with Louis XI of France and Venice and other Italian states. Lorenzo persuaded Naples to desert the pope. An invasion of Italy by the Turks in 1480 turned attention from the feud. After the death of Mohammed II and the withdrawal of the Turks from Italy the pope and Florence made peace.

Sixtus became involved in war with Ferrara by taking Forli for Jerome. Venice joined the pope and later made peace with Ferrara. The pope put Venice under the interdict.

In Rome the pope fanned the feud between the Colonna and the Orsini. By assassination and judicial murder the Colonna were almost blotted out.
Sixtus labored to beautify Rome. He straightened, widened and paved streets. He built churches, walls, gates and public buildings. He repaired the Hospital of Santo Spirito near the Vatican. He collected coins, gems, precious art objects and opened the first museum for the public. He favored humanist writers. Platina was restored to favor and commissioned to write a History of the Popes. John Argyropoulos taught Greek in Rome. The Roman Academy was reopened with Pomponius Laetomadus chief lecturer. Sixtus revived the Vatican Library in 1471. By 1474 his collection numbered over 3,500 volumes. Platina and four assistants catalogued the archives of the Vatican in three volumes.

Sixtus is best remembered as a patron of art. Melozzo da Forli painted a fresco in the Vatican Library with Sixtus seated and four nephews standing and the librarian, Platina, kneeling before the pope. The Sistine Chapel was built by Sixtus and named for him. He called the leading painters of the day to Rome to decorate it. Six frescoes depict the career of Moses and six illustrate Christ's mission on earth. His artists were Pinturichio, Signorelli, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino. Perugino depicted Christ giving the keys to Peter.

To carry on his projects Sixtus greatly increased papal taxation. Financial abuses of the curia multiplied. By a papal bull in 1476 Sixtus made an article of faith the widespread belief that indulgences are available for the souls in purgatory.

Sixtus also issued two bulls on the worship of Mary and the doctrine of the immaculate conception. He declared Mary sinless from the instant of conception. Sixtus was pious in all matters of ritual and outward religion. His chronicler, Volterra, praised his acts of devotion. He gave solemn sanction to the Spanish Inquisition in 1478. In a bull he increased the privileges of his order, the Franciscans, and canonized Bonaventura, the biographer of Francis d' Assisi.

Sixtus IV's wars and nepotism left the pope with few friends and almost completely destroyed the moral prestige of the papacy. He bankrupted the spiritual authority of the church with his politics. Infessura called the day of his death a happy day on which God liberated Christendom from an impious and iniquitous ruler who had no fear of God nor any Christian love or charity. He declared that Sixtus was moved by avarice, loved vain show and pomp, was cruel and given to sodomy.

It was in the last days of Sixtus that Martin Luther and Zwingli, the great reformers, were born.